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SUBJECT: ANOTHER NGO CONTEMPLATING LEAVING ERITREA

Classified By: AMB Ronald K. McMullen for reason 1.4 (d).

¶1. (C) The Lutheran World Foundation (LWF), one of the few remaining non-governmental organizations operating in Eritrea, may close its doors in the upcoming year if the operating environment worsens, stated representative Jan Schutte on April 10. Schutte commented on the extreme difficulties in implementing the LWF's developmental programs, and cited as an example a recently abandoned water project in the Hamadei district (northwest of Keren). The Government of the State of Eritrea (GSE) had insisted that the regional administration (zoba) take control of the project, preventing the LWF from adequately overseeing and monitoring the project in line with donor requirements, he explained. Schutte added that LWF has also lost a micro-credit program due to similar GSE bureaucratic requirements. Schutte stated that funding from one of LWF's primary donors, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), had dried up, except to support emergency relief aid, "due to the political situation in Eritrea." LWF still receives funding from sources in Holland and Norway for development assistance. Schutte noted that LWF has been barred by the Eritreans from doing any "capacity building" projects, and therefore is limited to overseeing only infrastructure-related programs (i.e., building schools, wells, water pumps). Given these two factors (the lack of ELCA funding and the host government bureaucratic hurdles), Schutte says that LWF is considering closing if it encounters further GSE restrictions.

¶2. (C) Difficult times for the LWF is not a new phenomenon. According to Schutte, in November of 2007, the GSE detained the LWF's senior local staff member, whose current whereabouts remain unknown. The LWF has also received no fuel rations since December of last year. Though Schutte did not refer to these early impediments as contributing to their current consideration to leave country, he did cite them as compounding difficulties to the current situation.
MCMULLEN